

# COVID-19 UPDATE FROM CITIZENS ADVICE BRENT – 09 SEPTEMBER 2021

## Family update

### Back to school campaign

As children in England return to school this week, the government has launched its [back to school and college campaign](#) setting out the expected student experience from September.

The easing of Covid restrictions means:

- nurseries, schools or colleges will no longer trace close contacts - this will be via NHS Test and Trace
- children do not need to remain in a consistent group ('bubble') and assemblies and larger group activities can resume
- face coverings are no longer mandatory but are recommended in enclosed and crowded spaces and on public transport and dedicated transport to school or college
- secondary schools and colleges have been asked to prepare for on-site testing at the beginning of the autumn term
- children under the age of 18 years and 6 months will no longer be required to self-isolate if they are contacted by NHS Test and Trace, and can still attend school. They will be advised to take a PCR test and only self-isolate if it's positive

The [guidance on what parents and carers need to know about early years providers, schools and colleges](#) has been updated

### Extension of family mediation voucher scheme

The government has announced [further investment into family mediation vouchers](#). The

scheme was introduced in March 2021 and offers separating couples a £500 voucher to pay for mediation services to help them reach agreement on disputes relating to children, including financial disputes. The vouchers are non means tested and the extra funding should help a further 2,000 families. [Find out more about how clients can use mediation and apply for the vouchers.](#)

## Immigration update

[Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme \(ACRS\)](#) This new scheme for post-evacuation settlement has been announced but has not yet been set up and it is unclear how it will operate. An [announcement on 7 September](#) expanded on the eligibility requirements and confirmed that people coming to the UK on this scheme will be granted indefinite leave to remain (ILR). This means they will have immediate access to benefits.

Those on the [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy \(ARAP\)](#) scheme will also be given immediate ILR. There will be people already in the UK on this scheme who can now switch to ILR. You can direct any Afghan citizen with limited leave under this scheme to an immigration lawyer to make this application.

### **Covid 19 - switching category and exceptional assurance update**

The [Home Office has updated its Covid advice for people in the UK on temporary visas](#). It is no longer possible to switch immigration categories whilst in the UK if that is not allowed by the rules - for instance from visitor to partner.

If your client already has 'exceptional assurance' they can make an application to stay and won't be treated as an overstayer as long as they apply before it expires

### **Right to rent checks for EUSS applicants - England and Wales**

This has now got more complicated for tenants and landlords with the revision of the [Landlord's guide to right to rent checks guidance](#). There are now 5 different ways to check the right to rent depending on the stage of the application and date it was made. There is a table on page 57 of the guidance which will make it easier to advise.

## Debt update

### **6-year Bankruptcy Restrictions Order (BRO) for sale of van on HP**

The Official Receiver (OR) has extended the bankruptcy restrictions on a plumber who had bought a van on hire purchase but sold it without the permission of the finance company. You can [read the press release about this on GOV.UK](#).

### **Government debt management toolkit**

The Cabinet Office has launched a new [Debt Management Vulnerability Toolkit](#) to help promote fairness in government debt management practices. The toolkit - which was developed by the Cabinet Office's Fairness Group's Vulnerability Sub Group, is designed to help government departments improve how they identify and support vulnerable customers in debt.

### **Support for mortgage interest (SMI) loans**

The interest rate charged by the DWP for SMI loans rose from 0.3 percent to 0.6 percent on 1 July 2021. At the same time the 'standard interest rate' used to calculate the level of support for mortgage interest loans has gone down from 2.61 percent to 2.09 percent.

## Employment update

### **End of Covid support**

The government's Covid-19 support for businesses - including the furlough scheme - comes to an end on 30 September. Advisers could be faced with a significant increase in redundancy cases as well as other cost-saving initiatives such as changing contractual terms and conditions, temporary lay-offs etc.

### **Care home workers and compulsory vaccinations**

Reminder: It will become compulsory for care home workers and anyone entering a care home to be vaccinated from 11 November 2021. This means the deadline for receiving the first vaccination is 16 September. You can [read the detailed guidance on GOV.UK](#).

The government guidance on eligibility for exemption on medical grounds is based on the discussions outlined on page 22 onwards of [Covid 19 – the Green Book](#).

The ICO has also published [guidance](#) around data protection issues arising from employers requiring their workers to disclose if they've been vaccinated.

## Benefits update

### **£20 pw uplift to UC**

This ends on 7 September. The last assessment period in which the uplift will apply will therefore be from 6 September to 5 October - you can check [Reg.2\(1\)](#).

### **Afghan relocation**

As noted in the Immigration update a new [Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme](#) has been announced and further details will be expected soon. People coming to the UK on this scheme will be granted Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and so will be eligible for all benefits. The announcement notes 'The new route is separate from, and in addition to, [the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy \(ARAP\)](#)'. Those arriving under ARAP will now be granted ILR immediately and as noted people already relocated to the UK under ARAP will be able to apply free of charge to convert their temporary leave into indefinite leave.

### **Recoverable hardship payments (RHPs)**

Those sanctioned under Universal Credit (UC) can apply for a RHP of 60% of the sanction reduction. However unlike hardship payments payable to those sanctioned on JSA and ESA who do not come under the UC system, UC RHPs are recoverable. Following a [judicial review challenge](#) by the Public Law Project (PLP) the DWP conceded that it had discretion to waive recovery of a RHP, including in cases where the sanction decision had been successfully appealed (as was the case in PLP's challenge). You can read their [note for advisers](#).

The DWP's [Benefits overpayments recovery guide](#) has subsequently been amended - see paras. 5.83 and 8.1. The DWP has now [written an open letter](#) to PLP explaining how UC claimants can apply for recoverable hardship payments after a sanction, and the process by which claimants can request that hardship payments are waived.